

Sinclair Broadcasting has apparently decided to influence the presidential election by making decisions at the corporate level to edit the flow of information to the American public (first denying viewers the opportunity to grasp the death toll in Iraq, and now mandating that TV stations they own will air an anti-Kerry documentary in the days leading up to the November elections). In my mind, this and the mistake made by news organizations in the year 2000 to call the election before the voting was finished (thereby potentially influencing voters) are clear examples of the danger democracy faces from media consolidation.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge to reach a quarter of the viewing population in this country, and is rightly obligated by law to serve the public interest. The FCC is in charge of enforcing these laws, and the public has loudly demanded the laws be upheld in the recent past. Large companies like Sinclair see only the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of balanced journalism, Sinclair is offering up a view of reality friendly to its own aims, and hoping that if it's the only view on the air, peoples' decisions at the polls will be favorable to the company.

Information is power; it is the government's duty to empower the citizen by facilitating voter decisionmaking and ensuring the flow of information. Big media actions to consolidate power by restricting information illustrate why media ownership rules should be stronger: hearing many voices makes democracy stronger. A single voice is the tool of totalitarianism.

The license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard, and after Sinclair's actions, I think you'll see many more citizens involved in the process.